



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Ranking Member Brian Babin

Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing *Space Situational Awareness: Key Issues in an Evolving Landscape*

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Today's hearing on space situational awareness, or "SSA," is a continuation of the Committee's longstanding interest in the topic. We've held numerous hearings over the last several years and considered two significant pieces of legislation last Congress: the American Space Commerce Free Enterprise Act and the American Space SAFE Act. I urge my colleagues to once again consider these important bills. SSA is an important topic for this Committee to consider, but we should do so in a deliberative manner. Near-misses in space attract media attention and calls for draconian regulations, but overreacting could be just as detrimental to our nation's space enterprise.

That being said, there are many things we probably all agree on.

First, we need better data. The Department of Defense (DoD) currently operates the lion's share of sensors that inform our understanding of where objects are in orbit. That won't change. Furthermore, the DoD does not release all of its data because of national security concerns. This is understandable. Other elements of the federal government play an important role as well. NASA, and more specifically the Johnson Space Center, which I proudly represent, and the Goddard Space Flight Center, are involved in SSA. They sit side-by-side with the military to monitor satellites and debris in space to ensure the International Space Station and science satellites are safe.

But the information the government and private sector are relying on to make sound decisions needs to be improved. Uncertainty about current data is too high, which leads to both unnecessary alerts and unpredicted conjunctions.

The second issue that we should all agree on is that the DoD should get out of the SSA business. DoD will always maintain sensors for tracking objects in space in order to protect national security, but they are not the appropriate agency to interact with the private sector or international partners. For this reason, the Administration proposed that the Department of Commerce serve as the government's "commercial storefront" for SSA. Commerce can then partner with the private sector, something they do well.

Commerce already houses the National Institutes of Standard and Technology, the world-leader in developing standards, manages export controls for satellite technology through the Bureau of Industry and Security, and coordinates spectrum issues through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. Commerce also houses the National Weather Service that conducts forecasts and issues alerts to protect life and property; operates a fleet of weather satellites under NOAA; and is the only agency that has statutory authority to license activity in space – space-based commercial remote sensing. They also have a history of providing a light-touch with emerging industries.

Commerce stood up the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) through a contract with a non-profit organization. ICANN was the organization responsible for developing policies, coordinating best practices, and managing the processes that led to a stable internet.

We've already seen the space community adopt a similar approach on their own. Several years ago, operators founded the Space Data Association to share information and improve safety. The Space Data Association demonstrates how the private sector can collaborate and innovate. More recently, the Space Safety Coalition was established to provide similar capabilities for operators in low Earth orbit.

Companies are also providing data and services on the open market. They are developing cost-effective, timely, and accurate SSA data, often relying on off-the-shelf and non-military technologies. In some cases, commercial capabilities are superior to DoD's. This is good news for America and for the global community, and we should help these nascent industries to grow.

The third issue we should all agree on is that we need to develop better standards and practices. Rather than imposing a top-down regulatory burden on an emerging sector, we should adopt a crawl, walk, run approach. In this regard, the International Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC) is an interesting case study. NASA developed its own orbital debris guidelines that were eventually adopted by the entire federal government and then accepted by most spacefaring nations as part of the IADC process. The guidelines are consensus-based principles that inform spacecraft development and operations, and could form the basis for developing rules of the road going forward. This could be augmented by contributions from the insurance industry similar to the role they played in the early days of maritime shipping.

I believe we can all work together to ensure space remains a safe environment for future generations without stifling industry with burdensome regulations before they ever launch. I want to thank our witnesses for appearing today, and yield back my time.

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